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ABSTRACT

Noting that linguistic intelligence is often the primary focus of teaching young children, this paper examines the relationship between children's learning and their social-emotional development. The paper first describes the preschools of Reggio Emilia and the theory of multiple intelligences. The paper then synthesizes research on children's emotional development—recognition of young children as "emotional compatriots" and the related importance of developing their emotional intelligence, the role of adult scaffolding to support children's development, and the intensification of children's learning when they represent their thinking in multiple media. A curriculum process is then highlighted that enables teachers to develop young children's emotional intelligence. The process engages teachers in supporting young children to identify and express their feelings and related experiences in multiple ways. The paper describes the curriculum process and specific scaffolding strategies teachers can use to support students' efforts. Elements in the curriculum process include storytelling, drawing self-portraits and action pictures, and story writing. The culminating activity, "Story Circle," provides a forum for children to share and discuss their work with peers. The paper concludes by noting that the range of representational opportunities embedded in this process enables children with a variety of intelligences to identify and share their feelings in meaningful ways. (Author/HTH)

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Emotions Count: [1] Scaffolding Children's Representations of Themselves and Their Feelings to Develop Emotional Intelligence

Claudia Shuster

Abstract

Following a discussion of the preschools of Reggio Emilia and the theory of multiple intelligences, this paper synthesizes research on children's emotional development—recognition of young children as "emotional compatriots" and the related importance of developing their emotional intelligence, the role of adult scaffolding to support children's development, and the intensification of children's learning when they represent their thinking in multiple media. The paper then describes a curriculum process that enables teachers to develop young children's emotional intelligence. The process engages teachers in supporting young children to identify and express their feelings and related experiences in multiple ways. The paper describes the curriculum process and specific scaffolding strategies teachers can use to support students' efforts. Elements in the curriculum process include storytelling, drawing self-portraits and action pictures, and story writing. The culminating activity, "Story Circle," provides a forum for children to share and discuss their work with peers. The range of representational opportunities embedded in this process enables children with a variety of intelligences to identify and share their feelings in meaningful ways.

The Preschools of Reggio Emilia and the Importance of Multiple Intelligences

The Hundred Languages of Children (Malaguzzi, 1996) is a metaphor for the myriad ways in which young children learn and communicate. It is an image that represents the underlying philosophy of the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, the most highly esteemed early childhood programs in the world. The pedagogy of Reggio Emilia emphasizes the dynamic collaboration of young children and teachers, working together in projects that support the "Hundred Languages," projects in which children represent themselves, their feelings, and their understanding of their world in multiple ways.

Howard Gardner (1993) has described the schools of Reggio Emilia as "remarkable…[places where] teachers know how to listen to children, how to allow them to take initiative, and yet how to guide them in productive ways" (pp. ix-xi). He commends them as educational environments that pay "attention to cognitive growth and concern with matters of temperament, feelings and spirit" (p. xiii).

Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences is in synchrony with the Reggio philosophy. He proposes that intelligence is composed not of one but of several separate modalities. Gardner suggests that these multiple intelligences are not fixed at birth but are plastic. Thus, experiences can have a significant impact on their development. Gardner encourages educators to provide opportunities that stimulate children to develop all of their intelligences. Expanding on this theory, Forman (1994) suggests that children learn more deeply when they have opportunities to represent their thinking in multiple media.

Unfortunately, linguistic intelligence is often the primary focus of teaching young children (Malaguzzi, 1996); many teachers ignore the importance of facilitating the development of the others (Shuster & Rarey, 1998). This oversight is currently being challenged. For example Goleman (1995) proposes that emotional intelligence, the combination of intrapersonal intelligence (the ability to understand one's thoughts, feelings, and actions) and interpersonal intelligence (the ability to understand other people's thoughts, feelings, and actions), plays a crucial role

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in both personal and work life. He emphasizes the importance of increasing the level of social and emotional competence in children as part of their regular educational program and reports on several recent efforts to develop emotional intelligence in school settings.

Recognition and Support of Young Children's Emotional Life

Psychologist David Elkind (1993) proposes that adults often fail to detect that children are our "emotional compatriots." Perhaps because young children think so differently from adults, we are likely to maintain the mistaken belief that children do not have the same feelings as adults or we may minimize or trivialize the significance of young children's day-to-day experiences and the power of their related emotions. As a result, we may fail to recognize, acknowledge, or respond to children's feelings. Research on American boys (Pollack, 1998) suggests that we are likely to compound our error with boys by actively teaching them to suppress their feelings and avoid expressing them. The efforts to develop children's emotional intelligence reported by Goleman (1995) may be in part a response aimed at reversing these cultural patterns.

The Relationship of Learning to Social-Emotional Content

Other researchers have examined the relationship between children's academic learning and the social-emotional content of their activities. According to Fivush (1997), children remember more accurately and are more competent in discussing past events when they have an emotional connection to those events. In addition, when youngsters have opportunities to engage in stories or activities with meaningful emotional content, their writing and speaking following these experiences are more detailed, more accurate, and more coherent (Liwag & Stein, 1995; Risemberg & Zimmerman, 1992). Children's dramatization of an emotional reaction, for example through role play, also seems to have a positive influence; children who participate in these kinds of activities use more advanced vocabulary and more sophisticated grammar when they are involved in other types of activities (Vedeler, 1997).

Role of Scaffolding to Support Children's Learning

In the preschools of Reggio Emilia, the teacher focuses on provoking discovery and learning "through a kind of alert, inspired facilitation and stimulation of children's dialogue, co-action, and co-construction of knowledge" (Edwards, 1993, p. 154). In this role, the teacher scaffolds children's thinking and feeling by providing support that is sensitively attuned to the child's current level of competencies (Wood & Middleton, 1975; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This support often takes the form of teacher–child discourse in which the adult questions, summarizes, clarifies, and predicts to encourage the child's explorations, representations, and thinking (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Development of a Curriculum Process

Based upon the synthesis of this research—the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983); recognition of young children as "emotional compatriots" (Elkind, 1993) and the related importance of developing their emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995); the role of adult scaffolding to support children's development (Wood & Middleton, 1975; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976); and the intensification of children's learning when they represent their thinking in multiple media (Forman, 1994)—I have developed a curriculum process to enhance young children's emotional intelligence. It provides opportunities for 6- to 7-year-old children to identify and represent themselves, their experiences, and their emotions in multiple ways and to develop empathy for their peers by their participation in the mutual process of sharing and discussing their representations. In addition, I have analyzed and identified four scaffolding strategies that I utilized to support the children's involvement in the curriculum process.

In a pilot study (1998-1999), I investigated several teaching strategies based upon the work of the preschools of Reggio Emilia and an exploration of the knowledge base related to teacher scaffolding strategies. The initial strategies that I utilized included asking children provocative questions, encouraging them to observe themselves carefully in a mirror and think deeply, and providing multiple means for them to

express their feelings. In my work with 20 first-graders, I identified some resistance to their sharing feelings. For example, several 6- to 7-year-old boys told me that they are never sad, angry, and/or scared and refused to represent these feelings. Other children simply remained silent. I attempted to engage these youngsters by sharing an autobiographical story from my childhood to evoke a specific feeling. When successful, this strategy resulted in their sharing stories that seemed to mimic mine rather than describing their own most powerful experience related to the emotion we were addressing.

In response, I have investigated and developed new ways to change this pattern of denial and suppression and to help young children recognize and express their feelings and related experiences. These activities involve the multiple forms of representation utilized in Reggio Emilia and emulated by American educators who reflect this tradition in a systematic way (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993; Forman, 1994).

The process I developed includes activities for 6- to 7-year-old youngsters that are implemented at least weekly by their teacher. The teacher supports the children's development of emotional intelligence by engaging them in work that helps them (1) to be more aware of their own emotions and the experiences that make them feel this way; (2) to represent their emotions through storytelling, self-portraits and other drawings, and writing or dictation; (3) to share their experiences and representations with peers; (4) to recognize, respect, and show empathy for other children's shared stories and related emotions; and (5) to use language and other effective, non-aggressive strategies to express their emotions and get their needs met. These elements are all critical in the development of emotional intelligence.

Before initiating the process, I asked the children to create self-portraits on their own. The children's first efforts provided a baseline to compare with their future work while engaged in the process with me over the next months. The children each completed a self-portrait (a drawing of their own face) on their own without adult presence; I provided no prompts or scaffolding—just paper, pencils, and crayons. Then I had the children each complete a self-portrait by providing a large mirror that enabled them to observe carefully in addition to paper, pencil, and crayons.

The Process

The process includes a series of eight steps:

Triggering Emotions with a Photograph

The process starts with the teacher's triggering children's memories by sharing a photograph of an expressive child and then encouraging the children to demonstrate or describe the facial expression of the child in the photo. Sharing a picture of a smiling child, I asked questions like, "How is this little boy feeling?" followed by "how can you tell?" Children's responses included "Happy; he is smiling…you can see his teeth…."

Storytelling about the Photograph

Then the teacher asks each child to tell a story about why the child in the photo may feel this way. Children mentioned events that they associated with pleasure—for example, eating a favorite food, playing a game, shopping for a favorite toy. When I provided time for deeper thinking, the youngsters also shared more significant experiences related to shared family activities such as birthdays, holiday celebrations, family outings, and vacations.

Storytelling about Yourself

Next the teacher asks the children to share a story of a time when they each felt the same way as the child in the photograph. For example, when I discussed feeling scared, some children talked about getting lost, getting accidentally locked in a room, being sick in the hospital, or fears related to the first day of school.

Observing Yourself in the Mirror

After each child has shared a personal story, the children look in a large mirror and describe their own facial expression related to the feeling in their story. For example, Evan shared [my lip] "gets all crumpley" [when I am sad]. Jimmy described "I look like a vampire when I look mean [to describe his angry expression]" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Children observing themselves in mirror while teacher scaffolds.

Drawing Self-portraits

Once the children have observed themselves in the mirror, they draw self-portraits that express their emotion. Some make observations as they stare in the mirror and draw. For example, Carol suggested, "I'm so angry that I'm so hot that I'm sweating [as she drew water droplets on her self-portrait].... I have these bumps that come out [pointing to swelling in her throat that she reproduced in her drawing]." Jose, observing and representing his furious expression, said, "I look like a cobra eye" (see Figure 2).

Drawing Action Pictures

Some children seem to find it easier to identify and share their experiences and emotions by representing the details of the event that precipitated their feeling. Therefore, the children also have the opportunity to draw a picture of the action of their story. For example, Maria drew a picture of her father inside the garage while she stood in her house shouting "Dad, Dad," expressing her fear that that she had been left all alone. Jose, angry that he couldn't ride his bike because of the bad weather, drew a picture of his bike parked in the driveway in front of the family car outside his grandmother's house with a sky filled with rain and lightning. Rather than focusing on the details of his sad facial expression in a self-portrait, Lucas drew a picture of himself falling out of a tree just before he broke his arm.

Writing and Reading Stories

After drawing, the children write or dictate their stories and share them with the teacher by reading the completed story. Some of the powerful themes of the children's stories include sadness at the loss of a beloved relative or pet; fears about illness, traveling on an airplane, being in the dark, shadows on the wall, or the "boggie man"; or anger at perceived mistreatment by siblings. For example, Gena dictated, "I don't like it when my sister says, 'I wish I can smack you,' and I don't like when my sister says 'I hate you,' and I hate my sister sometimes. I don't like when my mom yells at me, and I don't like when I don't get what I want. But you don't get what you want when you want it."

Sharing in Story Circle

The process culminates in Story Circle when the children share and discuss their work with their classmates. During Story Circle, modeled after the class meetings described in the Responsive Classroom model (Charney, 1992), the children's classmates are encouraged to ask questions and make thoughtful comments. Story Circle provides all the children with many opportunities to share their experiences and emotions with their peers and to learn about and empathize with the experiences and emotions of others. When Evan told about his great sadness in his story describing the time his Mom got rid of his cat (because it had fleas), his teacher praised the detailed drawing he made of his cat. She

Figure 2. Children drawing self-portraits while teacher scaffolds.

suggested that hanging a drawing like that in his room could help him to remember his cat. Several other children chimed in with similar stories about having a photograph of a grandparent no longer alive or making a picture of a lost pet, for example.

Addressing Multiple Intelligences

The process described above enables children to represent their emotions and experiences in multiple ways. Children with a strong bodily-kinesthetic intelligence are likely to be especially effective in making facial expressions that reflect their emotions and be more interested in observing themselves in the mirror. These abilities may lead these youngsters to create especially powerful self-portraits (see Figures 3, 4, and 5).

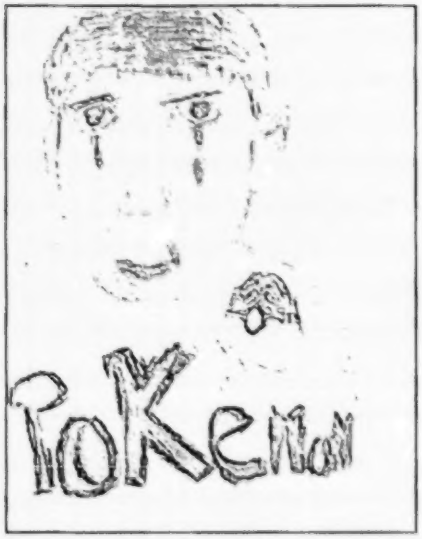

Figure 3. Child's self-portrait of himself feeling sad.

Other children with more strength in linguistic intelligence are likely to focus on sharing elaborate stories about their experiences or writing about them. In a story, Cindy dictated, "I got lost in the circus. And I went with another woman to the desk. And I went to the restaurant in the circus. I felt very, very, very sad, and I wanted my cousin Ryan and my other cousin named Charlie. It was my saddest day of my entire life." Writing his story, Jose described not being able to ride his bike "because I didn't know it was thundering outside. My bike was out there. I was afraid it was going to hit lightning but I was lucky. It almost did, but it didn't."

Figure 4. Child's self-portrait of himself feeling angry.

Figure 5. Child's self-portrait of herself feeling scared.

Children who have a strong spatial intelligence are likely to be interested in communicating their feelings in their drawings, especially in the details of their action pictures. For example, Evan drew a picture of his family picnic showing all seven members of his family including his mother (whom he drew from the rear on a ladder picking apples for the apple pie) and himself taking a nap on a blanket (see Figure 6). In drawing her action picture of feeling scared on the first day of school (because she did not know anyone), Carol drew many short yellow and brown lines depicting children seen from above as they lined up with their new classmates for the flag raising ceremony. The drawing appears to be a powerful representation of their anonymity from her perspective.

Figure 6. Child's action picture of his family picnic.

The Teacher's Ongoing Role—Scaffolding Strategies

The active role that teachers play in interacting with children to support their development is called scaffolding (Wood & Middleton, 1975; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Teachers scaffold children's development and learning by providing structures that support them to stretch their understanding beyond the level at which they've been functioning on their own. Vygotsky described this concept as the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986).

During the process described above, the teacher plays a pivotal role by using scaffolding strategies that support the children's efforts in four specific ways:

Setting a Positive Emotional Tone

The teacher creates a positive emotional tone when she conveys warmth, respect, and a listening attitude through eye contact and other body language, voice tone, and physical contact as appropriate. She also identifies, accepts, and shows interest in the children's feelings. For example, when the children hesitate to reply, the teacher might say in a gentle tone, "Take your time; we're all angry some of the time." When a child mimics the angry feeling in the photograph by making a furious grimace, the teacher observes with a serious demeanor and might say, "Wow, what a fierce expression. Everybody will know you're angry. It's important to be able to share how we are feeling, and our face shows how we are feeling." When Jose shared his anger at not being able to ride his bike on a rainy day, the teacher responded with a serious expression and said, "I can understand how angry you were because you couldn't ride your bike."

In another situation when a child described being frightened by an adult who popped out of a closet unexpectedly at Halloween, the teacher responded in a thoughtful tone, "When something happens that you weren't expecting, it feels scary."

Building Shared Understanding

The teacher shows how carefully she has been listening and builds mutual understanding with the children when she repeats the child's ideas in the child's own words or restates the child's ideas. She may try to add clarity by describing what she thinks the child is sharing and representing. Then she may ask the child to confirm, expand, and/or refine her own restatement. Occasionally the teacher will also summarize the child's statements to provide a memory for the child and his peers. For example, the teacher asked the children to review their examples, "So we've been talking about feeling scared. First you, Maria, talked about [teacher hesitates to encourage Maria to repeat herself] and Maria said, "Scared

of the dark." The teacher continued, "Then you, Evan, shared." Evan remembered and repeated "When my baby brother had a bad dream"; and the teacher replied, "That can be very scary" [acknowledging these experiences as frightening].

When a child indicated that he liked the curved lines on either side of the smiling mouth of his classmate's happy portrait because they conveyed her happiness, the teacher asked all the children to smile. Then she had them feel to see if they had the same lines form when they smiled, and observe their friends to see if they also had the same curved lines appear on their faces.

Extending Understanding

The teacher extends the children's understanding of their feelings and experiences and those of others when she asks meaningful, open-ended questions to stimulate, provoke, expand thinking, and avoid limiting conversation to a sense of a "right" answer. Maria shared a story about feeling scared that she was left alone when (from her perspective) her father was hiding in the garage. When she told the class that she let her father know that she didn't want him to do that again, the teacher emphasized that Maria's telling her dad how she felt was important and asked if he had hidden again after the first episode. When the child responded that he had not repeated this behavior, the teacher rejoined, "when we let people know how we are feeling and what we don't like, we can make a difference."

Supporting Empathy and Mutual Respect

The teacher supports the children's feelings of empathy and mutual respect by identifying common elements in their feelings and experiences and by encouraging dialogue among the children, observing and not intervening unless necessary during their conversations. For example, one child shared that she was scared on the first day of school because "you don't know the teacher…you might miss your mother." The teacher encouraged other youngsters to share their fears about the first day of school, and a girl told about not knowing any of the children in her class and not knowing the principal.

When a child shared his detailed drawing of a cat he had lost, the teacher emphasized the significance of his creating and displaying a picture that reminded him of his beloved pet. Then she encouraged other classmates to share strategies they used to remember lost loved ones. Youngsters shared their ideas of displaying a photograph of a grandparent, a painting of a dog that died, and so forth.

As the teacher supports the children by using these scaffolding strategies, the children themselves begin to emulate her and use the same strategies to support each other. For example, when Maria shared that her father was hiding in the garage, another child asked a thoughtful, open-ended question, "Why was he hiding on you?" and attentively awaited a reply. A second child said that Maria's story reminded him of Evan's story of finding himself alone in his home except that the feelings at the end of the two stories were different. In Maria's, she was scared and never learned why her dad was hiding. In Evan's, he was happy because he learned the reason for his parents' absence: they hid and then reappeared to surprise him on his birthday.

Conclusion

The classroom process described above provides children with many opportunities to recognize and share their emotions in multiple ways and helps them to express emotions and experiences that are especially significant to them. Examples of children's self-portraits prior to their participating in the process, contrasted with examples of children's self-portraits once they began to participate in the process, present powerful images of the development of the youngsters' representations of themselves and their emotions (see Figures 7 and 8). This work suggests that when children are given ongoing opportunities to share their experiences and express their related emotions through storytelling, drawing, writing, and sharing with their peers in Story Circle, they can more meaningfully integrate their experiences and represent them. Through this process, their contributions during Story Circle suggest that they also are developing both greater understanding of themselves and greater empathy for others—the hallmarks of emotional intelligence.

Figure 7. Adam's self-portrait before participating in the process.

Figure 8. Adam's self-portrait during his participation in the process.

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